Narcotics Raids Hit 10 Cities

131 Arrested; Major Ring Said Paralyzed

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By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

Federal agents this weekend arrested 131 suspects in a Latin-American narcotics ring that officials said controlled most of the cocaine and a large share of the heroin traffic in the United States.

Attorney General John N. Mitchell told newsmen at a Sunday-morning press conference that raids in 10 different cities had paralyzed the wholesalers' network, perhaps permanently.

The criminal enforcement chief of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, George M. Belk, estimated that the ring handled 75 to 80 per cent of all the cocaine, and about 30 per cent of the heroin coming into the United States.

One of the alleged ringleaders, Allen Eric Rudd-Marrero, 30, was critically wounded in a gun battle with narcotics agents at his home near Miami.

Another suspect was shot in the jaw, reportedly after reaching out from his car and dragging a Treasury agent 75 feet along a Manhattan street in a getaway attempt.

The arrests, which began at 10 p.m. Saturday night, climaxed six months of intensive undercover work, code-named "Operation Eagle." It was the biggest Federal narcotics raid in history, officials said.

Most of the suspects were Latin-American, many of them said to be Cuban refugees who fled to the United States after the downfall of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista.

Fifteen kilograms of cocaine and heroin—with a wholesale value of $259,000 and a retail price ten times that much—were seized in the raids, agents said.

The pickups stretched from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Los Angeles. Five suspects were arrested in Washington, D.C. Arrest warrants were issued for 190 defendants in all, and 59 were still being sought yesterday afternoon.

In addition to the narcotics seized over the weekend, Attorney General Mitchell said another 30 kilos of cocaine and heroin were obtained by undercover agents during the investigation.

One official said that Government agents spent close to $500,000 for the "evidence," wholesale. The retail price of all the narcotics piled up during "Operation Eagle"—the 30 kilos secured with "buy money" and the 15 seized over the weekend—was estimated at $8,990,000.

Mitchell called the operation "a tremendous success," but one that he said would have been impossible without court-approved wiretaps. Six of these, three in the Miami area, two in Chicago, and one in New York, were secured during May and June.

By then, said BNDD director John E. Ingersoll, "the investigation had reached the point where undercover activities would not reveal the identities of all the major traffickers and some agents conducting normal surveillances were fired upon by some of the subjects.

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Among the alleged ringleaders, singled out in affidavits attached to various warrants and complaints, were:

- Rudd-Marrero, owner of the Rancho-Woo Nightclub in Hato Rey, Puerto Rico. He also maintains a home in Coral Gables, Fla.
- Mario Escandar, alias Mario Escandar y Miguel, 35, of 3301 NE 5th St., Miami.
- Juan (Cesar) Restoy, 50, of 1809 Meridian Ave., Miami Beach.
- Rolando Exposito, 35, of 1928 SW 6th St., Miami.
- Leonides D. Suarez, alias Frank Suarez, 37, owner of the LeBaron Men's Wear Store, 2709 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago.
- Jorge Alonso Pujol, 46, of 9851 SW 16th Ter., Miami.

All six were described as natives of Cuba. Officials said none of the suspects was a member of the Mafia.

Ingersoll described the network smashed over the weekend as a loose "federation of organizations that deal with each other.

"The common belief that a handful of people control drug trafficking is contrary to fact," he said.

Mitchell said he expected the arrests to put a noticeable crimp in the flow of hard narcotics into the United States.

Narcotics agents said the ring's cocaine supply came from Latin and South America where it originates in the Andes Mountain regions of Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador.

The heroin, originating in the poppy fields of Turkey, was reportedly smuggled here by way of Beirut, then Curacao in the Dutch West Indies, then San Juan and finally Miami. One official said the ring apparently branched out to pick up a share of the heroin traffic during the past year or two in an alliance with some Lebanese merchants in the Windward Islands.

The first raids Saturday night were directed at suspects in Miami, New York and Chicago. They were followed up at 3 a.m. Sunday by more arrests there and in Washington, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, San Juan, Newark, Las Vegas and Hartford, Conn.

Justice Department officials said three agents had to force their way into Rudd's Coral Gables home where they spoted him "scurrying through the house holding a .38 Colt automatic and . . . shouting obscenities."

Two agents opened fire, shooting him in the chest and stomach, after Rudd allegedly aimed his gun at them from a distance of six feet. He was taken to a hospital in critical condition. His wife and seven-year-old son were in the apartment at the time.

Attorney General Mitchell cited the incident as illustrating the need for the administration's controversial drug-control bill with its authorization for "no-knock" warrants. He said Rudd was alerted when federal agents stood at the front door and announced their intent to arrest him.

Besides the drugs seized in the weekend raids, officials said they confiscated $19,875 in cash, 23 automobiles and 14 guns. The narcotics included half a kilo of heroin and 14½ kilos of cocaine.

Most of the defendants were charged with violating federal laws prohibiting possession, transportation or sale of heroin or cocaine, or conspiracy to violate those laws. Some were charged with violating federal gun laws.

All were held without bail for preliminary hearings starting Monday morning.